A

SPEECH,

IN WHICH

THE QUESTION

OF A

WAR WITH FRANCE

IS

STATED AND EXAMINED.

By a Lover of his Country.

Birmingham,
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NOW that War is, or is about to be declared, many may think that writings like the preſent, are not only unſeaſonable, but wicked. The Author thinks otherwiſe. From purſuing the meaſure he has combated, he is confident no good can ariſe; on the contrary, he is well convinced that great evils will, and that incalculable ones may; to him, therefore, it appears, that the country can only be ſaved by a ſpeedy retreat from the ſituation into which ſhe has ſo unwiſely and inconſiderately been brought; hence has he been induced thus late to ſubmit his ſentiments to the public eye, though much wiſhing it had occurred to him to have done this at an earlier period.

In the enſuing work, elegance of language and ſtudied arrangement, formed no part of the Author's object; his ſole aim has been to enable honeſt men to form a fair and impartial judgment upon the ſubject of which it treats. Among the topics which he might have adduced to ſupport his argument, which have been omitted is one of conſiderable magnitude, and that is the evils ariſing to ſociety at large

from meaſures that produce mutual and long continued hatred between powerful and neighbouring nations, whoſe union and cordiality would tend ſo much to the promotion of ſcience, letters, commerce, and in ſhort, of every thing that contributes to ſocial happineſs.

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SPEECH, &c.

SIR,

THE queſtion now before us, I conceive to be one of the moſt important that ever engaged the attention, of any people. It involves in it the welfare and proſperity of one of the moſt flouriſhing nations on the face of the globe; the intereſts not merely of the preſent generation, but moſt probably thoſe of many future ones. It behoves us then, Sir, to meet it with the greateſt poſſible coolneſs, to treat it with the moſt cautious deliberation, and to inveſtigate it accurately and profoundly. It is the future fate of our country that engages our attention, it is a duty to her that we are called upon to diſcharge, a duty of the moſt ſerious and ſacred nature. Its genius invokes us that we betray not our truſt, through neglect, through party ſpirit, or from a regard to perſonal conſiderations. It conjures us by the intereſts we, our deſcendants, and our friends have in its good ſtate, to act faithfully, to act the part of honeſt and enlightened citizens.

The queſtion, Sir, before us is, whether we are to have war or peace. That there may exiſt circumſtances which render war neceſſary, I, Sir, readily acknowledge. National independence, national honour, national ſafety, nations are obliged to maintain; and if this cannot be done without force, force muſt be uſed. But I do contend, Sir, that to a commercial, to a civilized, and to a chriſtian people, war ſhould be the laſt extremity; a remedy to which recourſe ſhould never be had, till every other had been tried in vain. All that negociation can do, is to be firſt attempted, it is only on the abſolute failure of this, that a Government is juſtified in the eyes of God and the People, in plunging a nation in the calamities and deſolations of war. War can only ariſe from the obſtinacy and injuſtice of the parties, or of one of them, the matter in diſpute muſt finally be ſettled by negociation, and what negociation effects after an immenſe ſpilling of blood, after an enormous waſte of treaſure, and the horrid ravages of various kinds which attend hoſtilities, it is as capable of effecting before ſuch hoſtilities are committed.

So little are we accuſtomed to think of firſt principles, that I cannot flatter myſelf ſo far, as to hope to produce any great effect by obſerving that war is the worthy offspring of ſavage and barbarous times,

times, the natural reſult of the conteſt of the paſſions before man riſes to be a reaſonable being, but a thing monſtrous and abſurd in an advanced ſtate of ſociety, as well as utterly ineffectual to anſwer the end it propoſes. Thus thought the brave Heny IV. of France, a prince as profoundly wiſe, as he was purely patriotic. We are all convinced of the abſurdity of judiciary combats to decide matters of right between private individuals—we do not now believe that victory will always be on the ſide of juſtice. Why ſhould victory any more be ſuppoſed to follow juſtice in the caſe of nations, than in that of individuals? Does the hiſtory of wars countenance ſuch an idea? Do the ſucceſſes of Ruſſia in Poland, or thoſe of the ſame Power againſt Turkey, ſupport ſuch a notion? I will not debate on the abhorrence in which, as chriſtians, we ought to hold war, but proceed to examine it in a connexion in which it comes home more cloſely to our feelings and intereſts. I beg leave to ſtate the light in which a commercial people ought to regard it.

It moſt manifeſtly operates to the diſadvantage of ſuch a people. It ſtrips its merchantmen of the neceſſary hands, in order to man the navy; it ſweeps away, by means of recruiting parties, thoſe who would otherwiſe be uſefully employed in manufactories, and in cultivating land. By throwing

difficulties in the way of foreign intercourſe, and by ſhutting up many foreign markets, it produces a ſtagnation in trade, the ill conſequences of which are felt by all, from the merchant to the loweſt working man. By expoſing the importation and exportation to capture, it produces loſſes which ruin individuals, and irregularities hurtful to the commerce, of which it does not deprive. By bringing on taxes, it reduces every man's poſſeſſions; for taxes laid upon a people, are ſo much money taken from the individuals who compoſe that people, and which is no longer really theirs, as it contributes neither to their neceſſities nor their pleaſures. By laying on new burthens, it increaſes the influence of Government, gives it an opportunity to gratify its dependants, by ſhares in loans, by civil and military nominations without number, and hereby weakens the ſtrength, and circumſcribes within narrower bounds the liberties of the ſubject. By diminiſhing, when, of any duration, to nearly one-half, the value of property in the public funds, in houſes, and in lands, it extends its oppreſſive influence to every claſs of the community.

Let us conſider war in relation to humanity. Let us bear in mind the carnage which it produces on one ſide, and on the other, the multitudes of whom we never hear, whoſe conſtitutions unable to bear

bear the fatigue and hardſhips of military life, linger away in camps and hoſpitals, combating in ſickneſs, difficulties of different kinds ſufficient to impair ſtrong health, and at length quitting life in circumſtances the leaſt ſolacing poſſible. Let us conſider alſo, that theſe ill-fated beings have wives and children, parents and relations, inconſolable for their loſs, who looked to them for protection, for ſupport, and for comfort.

Such, Sir, is war, that ſcourge of humanity, which unites in itſelf all the evils of all the plagues to which mankind are ſubject. And what mighty end does it anſwer, which could not as well be anſwered without it? Among modern nations, what has it ever been, but a preliminary to negociation? But what deluſion muſt blind the minds of men, to make them fix on a preliminary ſo hateful, expenſive, and uſeleſs? Does it not then become every conſiderate man, who is capable of looking into conſequences, to ſtartle at the idea of having recourſe to a meaſure ſo pregnant with evil, and ſo barren of utility.

There is one end, indeed, which it does anſwer, which recommends it to ſome people, but which I do not wiſh to conceal. It enriches contractors, ſharers in loans, and few other-like perſons;

ſons: but is every commercial intereſt, every con-ſideration of humanity, the lives of thouſands, th treaſures of the nation, the ſecurity (it may be) o public credit, to be ſacrificed, in order that theſe men may get immenſe fortunes? And pray what is the general character of theſe men, judge of it by their conduct during the American war. They ſupported the Miniſtry during the whole of that ill-managed and ruinous buſineſs, but took care to enrich themſelves while they were concurring in meaſures which impoveriſhed their country. Actuated by the ſame inducements, they are now ready to give the ſame ſupport to the preſent Miniſtry, ſhould they embark in a ſimilar project. It is not eaſy to ſet forth the influence which theſe men, ſharers in loans, and contractors, have over the nation, and of courſe over public meaſures, had they as ſtrong reaſons againſt a war, as they have for a war, that is to ſay, if their intereſt ſhould be as much ſerved by no war, as they reckon it will be in caſe there is a war, I ſhould feel ſtrong hopes that we ſhould ſtill enjoy the bleſſings of peace.

But to take leave of theſe gentlemen, whoſe intereſts cannot have any weight with us; with us, Sir, whom I conſider as having each of us inwardly formed the ſolemn irrevocable determination, to act in this matter in that manner which our judg-

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ment and our conſciences, after reflection, proportioned to the importance of the object before us, ſhall tell us is right. I proceed then to conſider war in reference to the particular ſituation of this country, and to examine whether our circumſtances are ſuch, as are likely to palliate, or ſuch as in all probability will aggravate the unavoidable evils of ſuch a calamity.

Where, Sir, is the nation that carries on half the traffic that England does, and which holds out ſuch rich booty to an enemy? Where is the nation half ſo dependent upon its commerce? Commerce has affected even our very phyſical frames; it has formed our habits, it has led us to a ſtyle of living far above what the natural reſources of our country will enable us to ſupport; it has converted artificial wants into natural ones; it has rendered conveniencies and enjoyments, not neceſſary in themſelves, eſſential to our comfort; hence, if we loſe our commerce, we ſhall become the moſt miſerable of people. How cautious then does it become us to be, in determining upon any thing that ſhall impair it, or expoſe it to danger! Will it become us on light grounds, to expoſe the produce of the ſweat and labour of our ingenious and induſtrious countrymen, the produce of our Eaſtern and Weſtern Colonies, and the whole of our extenſive and valuable

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importation, to be the prey of adventurers of all nations, who, depend upon it, immediately that war is declared, will iſſue forth from French ports under French colours. When this havock is made in our trade, what is to become of the armies of manufacturers, who will be reduced to want of bread?

In chuſing weapons, every one ſhould conſider not merely what will annoy its adverſary; but alſo thoſe which it can with moſt ſafety uſe. Alliances and negociations, are the means which a commercial nation ſhould take to ſettle its differences, and not the dreadful expedient of a war. Here we cannot have fair ground meaſured with our enemy; this is the caſe, while we ſubject to his aſſaults infinitely more than what he lays open to ours. What a prize does our immenſe commerce preſent to his enterprize? It is that to which he will find it moſt his intereſt to direct his force. It is the part where attack may be moſt eaſily made, and where we moſt ſenſibly feel. Here his efforts will anſwer to him in a variety of ways; he will enrich himſelf, he will impoveriſh individuals among us, will ſpread diſcontent and deſpondency among the people, and will thereby weaken the ſtate, and leſſen its reſources.

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Before we provoke attacks from abroad, it becomes us to conſider our ſtate at home; our vulnerable points, if they eſcape many of us, are, I ſuſpect, well known to thoſe with whom we are going to be at war. If I touch upon them, it is not that I wiſh to introduce dejection, but rather to correct preſumption, to awaken from fatal ſecurity to a ſenſe of the danger into which we ſeem diſpoſed to plunge. Are our immenſe poſſeſſions in the Eaſt Indies on a footing ſo firm, as to leave us nothing to apprehend from the arts of a politic enemy, which has already found out the means to induce Turkey to attack Ruſſia and the Empire? Is there no miſchief which intrigue can produce in our Weſt India Iſlands? The ſtate of Ireland ſhould not be overlooked; the diſcontents which prevail there and in Scotland, if not ſerious in themſelves, may be rendered truly ſo in caſe of a foreign war. The ſtate of our public credit, is a ſubject that intrudes itſelf on our thoughts in circumſtances like the preſent. Should this war be protracted to a a great length, who will pretend to foretell the influence it may have upon it! Should it not be annihilated by the preſent war, is it deſirable to be brought to the next ſtage to bankruptcy? But, alas! when war is once begun, who knows where it will terminate? May it not continue till our reſources are exhauſted? War drains reſources

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in two ways, it ſubjects to the payment of greater ſums, while, at the ſame time, it clogs and circumſcribes the exertions of that induſtry, on which theſe are to be levied. It increaſes the burden, while it weakens the ſinews of the body that is to ſupport it. In ſhort, Sir, there never was a nation that had more ſolid and commanding reaſons to avoid a war than the Engliſh in its preſent circumſtances.

Such are the hazards and perils we ſhall have to encounter, if we go to war. Does the meaſure meet with the cordial and unanimous ſupport of the country? I apprehend that if the ſtate of the public mind was fully known, we ſhould find a vaſt proportion of the people utterly averſe to it, and were the ſame pains taken to lay the matter fairly before them, which are now uſed to excite their prejudices and to inflame their minds, I have no doubt but that a great majority would very ſoon declare againſt it.

I come now to conſider what grounds there may be for a war. Upon the conduct and meaſures of the French, except as far as they reſpect ourſelves, I ſhall hold myſelf bound to give no opinion. The queſtion before us is, have they injured us? And if they have, in what way. It is replied,

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that they have ordered the Scheldt to be opened. But have they not promiſed, that at the cloſe of the war, they will leave this matter to be decided by the Belgians. Had we aſked them to let the navigation remain, in the mean time, on its former footing, it is highly probable that the demand would have been complied with. Why, if the matter be really important, and not a mere pretence to cover other deſigns, was not ſuch a demand made? And ſhould we not leave it to be finally ſettled by the Belgians and the Dutch? If the latter ſhould have no objection, that the former ſhould be reſtored to their ancient privilege of ſailing along a river that runs through their territory, I do not ſee why we ſhould meddle in the affair. There ſurely can be nothing in all this to give offence to a reſpectable and juſt nation. Should the Dutch indeed call upon us to adhere to the treaty, when circumſtances have ſo materially changed, it would then be time enough to think of reaſons to prove to them that the affair is not of magnitude enough to juſtify them or us to commit ourſelves to the hazards of war, nor ſhould we find it a difficult matter to perſuade this peaceable people to liſten to them.

The next ground of accuſation, is the decree by which they promiſe to aſſiſt all people fighting for their liberty. This has been conſtrued to be

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an encouragement to univerſal anarchy and ſedition, as tending to unſettle all eſtabliſhed governments. But have they not ſince explained away this decree, and have not the explanations been as public as the decree itſelf?

Views of aggrandizement are laid to their charge. The union of Savoy with France is alledged as a proof. Have we evidence that they took any ſteps to induce the Savoyards to adopt this meaſure? It appears to have been perfectly voluntary on the part of the latter, and the union to have been agreed upon, becauſe it was mutually advantageous to the parties. I cannot ſee that, in this caſe, we have more right to take umbrage at them, than Henry the Fourth would have had for being ſimilarly affected, when the kingdom of Scotland was in a manner united to that of England under our James the Firſt. Beſides, if this meaſure ought to give offence (I mean not to maintain poſitively that it ought not, or to ſay that it is a thing which ought to be viewed by us with indifference) why did we not interfere ſooner? If we thought the King of Sardinia unjuſtly attacked, why did we not remonſtrate? The decree for making Savoy an 84th department, was long in agitation; if we had any objection, and wiſhed to preſerve good neighbourhood, why were we ſilent all this time? why

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did we not enter our proteſt againſt this additional acquiſition of territory? We perhaps were apprehenſive, that we ſhould be reminded of our late acquiſitions in India, which we were permitted to make, without any demur on the part of France. We have not thought it incumbent upon us always to prevent aggrandiſements of this ſort: we made no ſtir at the time of the partition of Poland. The ſhameful proceedings of Ruſſia in the ſame kingdom, at preſent carried on, we do not think it right to diſturb.

The French are accuſed for the reception given by the Convention to the Deputies of certain Societies in this country. As this charge is ſo vague, no ſpecific anſwer can be expected. How was the Convention to know that this would give offence to the Engliſh government, while it tolerated the exiſtence of theſe ſocieties, and took no method to teſtify its diſpleaſure with reſpect to their public meaſures? Why were not theſe griefs notified to the proviſional executive government of France, as they aroſe, if it was really the deſire of England to preſerve peace. Had remonſtrances in proper form been made, and had they not been attended to, we ſhould then have ſtood on very different grounds to what we now do.

What the errors and exceſſes are, into which the French may have fallen, in the management of their internal concerns, whether the blame of outrages which all good men muſt lament and condemn, are to be laid at their door, or at the door of thoſe European powers which interfered in their affairs, are matters entirely foreign from the preſent ſubject of conſideration. From all that has come before the public eye, it muſt appear to every man of impartiality, that the conduct of the French towards England, has been highly reſpectful; that they have manifeſted the ſtrongeſt deſires for peace. If the French were not ſolicitous to avoid a war with England, why did they not recall their Ambaſſador when we recalled ours. Why did they paſs unnoticed the abuſive rhapſodies ſo indecently and impertinently vented againſt them in the Houſe of Commons, by Mr. Burke and others? Why elſe did they ſuffer us to carry into execution our ſchemes of aggrandizement in India, without once making any remonſtrance? There we have made great acquiſitions, and levied heavy contributions, and yet the French have lodged no complaint againſt us. Has the government of England been repeatedly libelled; has every diſgraceful and opprobious epithet been heaped on the Engliſh people in the National Aſſemblies of France? Has the commercial treaty been violated, a treaty which is ſo much

much for the advantage of this country, and which every Frenchman knows is not reciprocally beneficial? Is there any thing like ſatisfactory proof, that a ſingle miſſionary was ever ſent here to propagate French principles? If there are any men in this country, really deſirous to ſubvert any of the three eſtates which conſtitute our government, I am confident that, upon enquiry, it will be found, that they did not learn thoſe principles from French Miſſionaries. In our charges againſt nations, as well as againſt individuals, we ſhould be juſt, we ſhould advance nothing without proof, we ſhould guard againſt acting upon groundleſs ſurmiſes, eſpecially when the conduct we purſue may prove moſt fatal to ourſelves. But whatever griefs we have to allege, let us firſt attempt to obtain redreſs by negociation. That it would not become our dignity to negociate with the French, is an idea too abſurd to be ſeriouſly treated, and one that is not in the leaſt countenanced by our practice on other occaſions; for, as Mr. Fox has obſerved, "We "had a Miniſter at Verſailles when Corſica was "bought and enſlaved. We had Miniſters at Ger-"man courts at the time of the infamous partition "of Poland. We have generally a reſident Con-"ſul at the piratical Republic of Algiers; and we "have more than once ſent embaſſies to the Em-"perors of Morocco, reeking from the blood

" through which, by the murder of their neareſt " relations, they had waded to the throne. In " none of theſe inſtances," *he farther very juſtly obſerves*, " was any ſanction given by Great Britain " to the tranſactions by which power had been ac- " quired, or to the manner in which it had been " exerciſed*."

I now come to conſider the ſort of oppoſition we are to expect in the preſent conteſt. Some think, alas! but they are men of little knowledge and reflection, that we are going to have an eaſy game. The vaunts and pleaſantries of Miniſters, and their creatures, at the commencement of the American war, are not yet effaced from our memories, nor have we forgotten how ill-founded they were. The population of America did not at that time exceed two millions, and it lay diſperſed over an immenſe ſpace; the people were divided among themſelves as much as the French at preſent are; they were no way prepared for war, without money, without ammunition, and without men; and yet in this war our loſs amounted to one hundred thouſand lives, and one hundred and fifty millions ſterling. Why we ſhould expect to carry on war at a leſs expence of blood and treaſure, againſt a nation conſiſting of twenty-five or twenty-ſix millions of men, lying on a ſmall and compact ſurface,

* Mr. Fox's Letter to the Electors of Weſtminſter, page 34.

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whoſe ſoldiers are already diſciplined, already furniſhed with arms, and in a great meaſure ſupplied by ourſelves; already victorious over the firſt diſciplined troops, the moſt experienced and famed generals of Europe, animated by an ardour and enthuſiaſm unknown ſince the days of ancient Rome; poſſeſſed of an activity and energy not to be looked for, except in great conjunctures like that in which they now find themſelves. Rendered deſperate by oppoſition, regarding nothing as too valuable to riſque, or too hazardous to attempt in the conteſt they are carrying on for their national independence, reſolved to ſee their country a heap of ruins, and themſelves deſtroyed as a people, rather than be deprived of this. Still poſſeſſed of great reſources, and receiving vaſt ſums as patriotic gifts, or voluntary donations, with no foreign commerce to loſe, and careleſs about their colonies. Such is the ſituation, and ſuch are the diſpoſitions of the enemy with which we ſhall have to encounter. Has he not every advantage over us; what ſingle one have we, or indeed can we have. He will feel the enthuſiaſm of one who fights for every thing moſt dear to humanity. What can animate us, acting in conjunction with powers who profeſſedly invade the moſt ſacred and precious treaſure of a people, their LIBERTY.

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From the united forces of Europe, France has little to fear; from internal diviſions much, a great deal more, it is probable, than is generally ſuppoſed. In this ſituation foreign attacks will ſerve it. The greateſt poſſible danger from without will be a benefit. This ſeems neceſſary to unite parties, to harmonize and conſolidate the diſcordant factions into which the nation is ſplit. What more likely to effect this than our going to war with them. So that while we differve ourſelves more than any people ancient or modern ever did, we are really promoting the intereſts of thoſe whom profeſſedly we endeavour to injure. Auſtria, which will be one of our allies in this bleſſed buſineſs, has nearly exhauſted her finances. If ſhe can go through another campaign, it is all that can be expected from her; if ſhe carries on any more, England muſt pay the expence. War is at beſt a hazardous buſineſs; it is much under the influence of chance; the battle often is not to the ſtrong, nor the race to the ſwift. Let us ſuppoſe that by any concurrence of circumſtances we are unſucceſsful during the firſt campaign, that the enemy at length forms alliances, and is enabled to ſow diviſions between the combined powers, and this war is protracted out to the ſame length with ſome former wars. What will then be the picture of Old England? Shall we then raſhly and inconſiderately, without pauſe

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or reflection, bid adieu to the bleſſings of peace? Now we have trade every day extending; manufactures, moſt of which flouriſh; agriculture, which becomes more and more the ſubject of attention; enterprizes favourable to commerce continually entered upon, and meeting with no hindrance; ſhipping that explore the riches of every climate; population at home that increaſes; towns and villages overflowing with inhabitants; we have no enemy any where--we are courted and reſpected by contending powers; enriching ourſelves, while others are draining their reſources; our revenues, notwithſtanding our immenſe expences, producing a ſurplus, capable of being employed to reduce our burthens; the inhabitants of our ſea coaſts free from apprehenſions; peace, ſecurity, and abundance every where reigning. How ſhall we reliſh after theſe the fruits of war? How ſhall we bear to ſee our ſhipping captured, our manufactures deſerted, our towns forſaken, our population dwindling, our traffic reduced, our revenues unequal to our expences, the inhabitants of our maritime counties filled with conſternation, our waggons no longer bearing the produce of our induſtry, but loaded with military ammunition, our young men lying idle in camps and garriſoned towns. Alas, painful is the picture; may we never live to ſee it realized! Let us then oppoſe, as far as we can do it peaceably and

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conſtitutionally, a meaſure which ſeems ſo calculated to reduce us to this unhappy ſituation. If inſtead of this we ſend up no remonſtrances to Parliament againſt the war, but lie tamely by, be aſſured, Sir, that poſterity will mark the preſent as a period of ſtrong deluſion, and the men of this generation as men infatuated by the moſt deplorable and fatal party ſpirit. Truſting for ſupport to the wonted wiſdom and good ſenſe of Engliſhmen, I move that this meeting do preſent a petition to the Honourable the Houſe of Commons, praying in the uſual forms, that that Honourable Houſe would adopt ſuch meaſures as to its wiſdom ſhall ſeem beſt calculated to inſure to the country a continuance of the bleſſings of peace.

FINIS.